EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
“BRAIN TRUST” HELD JULY 11, 2017

On Tuesday, July 11, 2017, thirty-nine early education experts from Nassau and Suffolk Counties gathered at the Western Suffolk BOCES Conference Center. The group included school district administrators, Pre-K directors from community-based organizations, executives of nonprofit organizations, representatives from higher education, and leaders from the Island’s three BOCES and two Child Care Councils. Their common mission: developing strategies to pave the way for Pre-K for all Long Island four-year-olds.

The Process: The “Brain Trust” participants were divided into five working groups. Each was asked to address, in turn, three questions. After each question was explored, there was a report to the larger group and discussion.

Question #1: What would be the best way to provide Pre-K for all Long Island children?

Summary of group findings and discussion: There is a pressing need for some kind of infrastructure—perhaps a consortium, perhaps the through BOCES and/or Child Care Councils. Such a consortium/manager could help identify points of commonality and alleviate the issue of New York City being one school system and Long Island being 123 different systems. (Note: There are three additional school districts that are Central High School Districts and thus could not have Pre-K programs.)

Perhaps there is even a way for all the funding for young children to be centralized, and then for that funding to follow the child—health, early intervention, child care, Pre-K. If the funding streams were consolidated, this would more closely follow the example of the New York City Department of Education.

In the five boroughs, New York City controls all of Head Start, Child Care, etc. and one person—DiBlasio—is the champion. We don’t have that on Long Island. Even if all those structures were in place, we don’t have a champion willing to use his or her political capital.

Question #2: What are some of the challenges to delivering Pre-K in this manner and how might we address the challenges?

Summary of group findings and discussion: There are many hurdles to be overcome before we can offer Pre-K for all four-year-olds. These include:

- lack of leadership for the Island as a whole
- the autonomy and large number of school districts
- lack of transportation [at the Pre-K level]
• lack of appropriate facilities for early childhood programs
• lack of knowledge about Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP)
• low salaries—many early childhood teachers don’t make a living wage
• teacher training—the colleges don’t send student teachers to early childhood settings
• different values in different communities along with changing family demographics
• cultural competency—hurdles caused by racism and classism.

The overall challenge is to get a message across to key stakeholders—and to reach Governor Cuomo directly, if possible. We need to change the Long Island mindset: People need to view Pre-K as a collective benefit. Ultimately, nothing will happen without public will. If Pre-K isn’t being talked about, it won’t be a priority.

Question #3: What would have to happen to make our vision a reality?

Summary of group findings and discussion: We need to build the will to implement Pre-K for all. For that to happen, we need to collect data, know how many children there are and have an idea of their needs. We need to know in advance how much money is needed to implement our vision and what the capacity of existing buildings is—including CBOs.

We have to consolidate the Pre-K campaign but broaden the audience. There may be different stories we need to tell different stakeholders—for example, parents may need a personal connection; superintendents may need to see data. At the same time, we need to keep our messages simple. When there’s a crisis, things happen more quickly. Some think there’s a crisis around Pre-K right now, so one approach might be to make people understand that.

And there’s a real need for a champion to carry this message. What’s more, in order to devise real, actionable steps we need a smaller working group to tackle this.

We need millions of dollars to serve all the children the way we’d like to, but in the meantime resources can be leveraged by building community coalitions. It should be possible to refine our message and get it repeated in our communities by people that parents and other residents trust.

Next Steps:

• A smaller group will be formed to explore messaging and coalition building
• Executive Summary of the Brain Trust findings will be shared with the Long Island Pre-K Initiative Advisory Council and with other thought leaders in our field
• Existing palm card with messages about the state of Pre-K on Long Island will be updated and refined
• Long Island Pre-K Initiative communications channels—e-newsletter, Twitter, and web site—will convey information about the Brain Trust and its findings to a larger audience within the early childhood community.
List of Participants:

Lori Andrade, Health and Welfare Council of Long Island
Danielle Asher, Family Leadership Network/Choice for All
Florence Barbour, Harbor Child Care
Amy Brennan, South Country CSD
JoAnn Cascio, Early Childhood Educator
Michele Cohen, Nassau BOCES
Joy Connolly, Child Care Council of Nassau, Inc.
Linda Crispi, Campus Kids—Suffolk Community College
Shannon Cussen, YMCA of Long Island
Kathy Deerr, Middle Country Public Library/Family Place Libraries
Andre Eaton, Parent-Child Home Program
Regina Farinaccio, Nassau BOCES
Dana Friedman, Suffolk County Department of Social Services
Janice Friedman, Variety Child Learning Center
Stephen J. Hernandez, Hofstra University
Lisa Hilliard, Child Care Council of Nassau, Inc.
Lucinda Hurley, Nassau BOCES
Bob Keeler, Consultant/retired Newsday columnist
Gillian Kessinger, Child Care Council of Nassau, Inc.
Susan Kessler, Western Suffolk BOCES
Kathy Liguori, Habitots Preschool and Child Care Center
Christine Lopes, Uniondale UFSD
Lisa Omeis, Lindenhurst UFSD
Lynda Parmely, Hagedorn Foundation
Adrienne Robb-Fund, The Long Island Pre-K Initiative
Joan Rocchetta, Child Care Council of Suffolk, Inc.
Pepper Robinson, Five Towns Early Learning Center
Thomas Rogers, Syosset UFSD
Jennifer Rojas, Child Care Council of Suffolk, Inc.
Janine Sampino, Rockville Centre UFSD
Patti Schaefer, Rauch Foundation
Anita Sethi, Happy Montessori School
Lorraine Smyth, Hewlett-Woodmere UFSD
Ann Marie Thigpen, Adelphi University
Emily Torres, Child Care Council of Suffolk, Inc.
Janet Walerstein, Child Care Council of Suffolk, Inc.
David Wicks, Eastern Suffolk BOCES
Jackie Zaita, Child Care Council of Suffolk, Inc.
Angela Zimmerman, Molloy College